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THE REMINISCENCES OF FOUR SOUTHERN WOMEN¹

The philosopher and patriot, who a hundred years from now shall undertake the writing of the history of the United States, will be glad of sidelights on the political and social decades preceding the war between the States. The conditions of those who lived in the section which was overcome but not conquered will be of no less value. The Confederate War seems a simple narrative. The people were fired with the one purpose of success. The single object before every man, woman, and child was the independence of the Southern Confederacy. The complex conditions faced afterward are different. That anarchy was not the result proves the saneness of the Southern white people and the wonderful influence and training that they exerted and had given to the black people.

Only two hundred years it was since the blacks had been sold to civilized white men in America. We learn from old chronicles when the negroes were first imported that there was a general impulse to teach them to read and to write. In South Carolina, Eliza Lucas, the Colonial Dame, in a letter to her father says that she is teaching two girls in the hopes that they may be school mistresses to the other negroes on the plantation. Commissary Garden had a night school attended by many of the blacks. The Africans took more readily to manual training than to books. They learned to plow, hoe, dig, cook, sew, clear-starch and iron with facility. Naturally they took their places as hewers of wood and drawers of water. The mind of the master, the eye of the mistress was over all. In the swamp lands it was a battle of brain and body to overcome the forces of nature.

¹ A VIRGINIA GIRL IN THE CIVIL WAR. By Myrta Lockett Avery. New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1903.

A BELLE OF THE FIFTIES. Memoirs of Mrs. Clay of Alabama. Put into narrative form by Ada Sterling. New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1905.

REMINISCENCES OF PEACE AND WAR. By Mrs. Roger A. Pryor. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1904.

A DIARY FROM DIXIE. By Mary Boykin Chestnut. Edited by Myrta Lockett Avery and Isabel Martin. New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1904.

There were cypress trees to be felled. Canals to drain, dykes to restrain the waters, were dug and built.

Mr. Joel Chandler Harris says that "the busiest women the world ever knew were the wives and daughters of the Southern planters. Bolts of cloth, much of it spun and woven at home for probably as many as a hundred persons, were to be cut and sewed into garments. Often the ladies of the families with their own hands cut the material; it was always done under their supervision. With the master often absent on public or private business — the country doctor miles away — it was the mistress, who in cases of emergency administered remedies, or in simple surgery took the stitches necessary to draw together the edges of a gaping wound."

The women of the South were thus all around women. Notable as housekeepers and conversationalists, the way in which they took hold and accomplished menial tasks after Emancipation proved that they knew how everything should be done. The mudsills of humanity, whether they belong to the plantation, factory, or sweatshop, are among the mysteries of existence. In spite of its faults the system of African slavery developed noble powers in men and women. How else understand the heroic struggle, for the principle of State Sovereignty — misunderstood by the whole world — which was made by the people of the Southern Confederacy? How else explain in the short period of fifty years the rejuvenation and complete making over of a country whose young men had fallen in battle and had died in prison and hospital by the thousand — with the territory laid waste; the whole basis of life and labor revolutionized; millions of dollars worth of property taken without indemnity; public buildings and private residences burned; even jewelry, plate, and clothes wrested from the hands of non-combatants by an invading army? Columbia, South Carolina, the Capital of the State, a small town of ten thousand population, burned — seven thousand women and children made homeless, gathering corn where the army had fed their horses to parch for food — is now in fifty years grown into a city of thirty-thousand population with the largest cotton mill in the world. Such rapid material advancement, with colleges, schools, public and rural libraries established and fostered,

may well be a wonder. And everywhere throughout the South the same progress is found. A people who can gather up fragments to rebuild thus, must have been a people who comprehended the economy of existence and the true philosophy of living, trained to the heroic qualities of self-control, self-abnegation, and self-respect.

A class of negroes in the South seem to have had their opportunity and to have failed to grasp it. In the States where the blacks exceeded the whites in a considerable ratio, it was considered good policy to give to negroes, who were especially faithful in times of public danger, their freedom. From this class came very competent tradesmen. Others who were mechanics would hire themselves from their masters at a moderate wage, by industry they would save money and buy the freedom of wife and children. Thus was created a class of free men and women of color with intelligence, character and ambition. They had their own schools; but not their own churches, attending the same as the whites. A particular portion of all religious edifices was set aside for their use. Usually they preferred urban life. The men were almost all skilled mechanics and were frequently contractors. Blocks of buildings were put up by negro workmen alone. The women excelled as nurses for the sick, as seamstresses, as pastry-cooks. If in trouble, to the third and fourth generation, they came back to the families of their former owners. It seems strange that out of this material a Moses has not arisen from among them to lead his people since Emancipation.

Perhaps there was nothing more remarkable in the four years of war than the development of the negro's attitude. The Emancipation Proclamation which was issued in September, 1862, was a notice to the Confederates to return to the Union or suffer the penalty of having their negro property freed. The real proclamation, freeing the slaves, was put forth as a war measure, January 1, 1863. It might have been expected that the result of such proclamation would have been arson and massacre of the masters who ignored Lincoln's authority and held the slaves still as bondsmen. Some, as from the beginning, slipped through the lines to the Federal Army and Northern States. The great majority bided the result of the white man's war. Capt. White,

of Fort Mill, South Carolina, has erected on the public square, in his little town near the Confederate Monument, a monument to the negro servants of the Confederate States. The inscription is a tribute to their faithfulness to masters and mistresses during the Confederate War.

Four volumes, which have been published recently, three in the last twelve months, furnish a transcript of scenes and times relating to the old South. The most valuable records are, perhaps, those without any profound reflections on the meaning of events. The simple story of a life, or the pages of a diary, may give fuller illustrations than a philosophic disquisition. Epigrams, like the electric spark, scintillate from the lips of great men, clever women respond with sincerity or it may be with persiflage, and books recording these reveal snap shots of the passing show; when developed with skill, they make beautiful pictures of the times.

The four books recording these passing occurrences in an unpretentious way are well worthy of general attention. The Colonial Dames have been exploited by the organization bearing their name; the women of the Revolution are crystallized by the patriotic society known as the D. A. R.; but the women who lived and loved from the Revolution to Reconstruction have not yet found chroniclers. The first of this series of books which help furnish these missing data, is "A Virginia Girl in Dixie," written by Mrs. Myrta Lockett Avary, and issued by the Appletons. It is a biography of especial interest; without formality intimate events of life are told with vivacity. Mrs. Avary lived in the house with "Nelly Grey." She heard her relate camp scenes, home trials, tell of running the blockade. Putting herself into the place of her friend, she wrote the biography in the first person. The record of the girl-wife's life during the war in "Dixie" is moulded into a narrative as spirited as, but more effective than, a novel.

"A Belle of the Fifties" was issued from the press of Doubleday, Page & Co., in September, 1904. It is admirably written, in narrative form, by Miss Ada Sterling. The public owes a debt to the persistence of this lady. By her insistence she has rescued from old age a lovely picture of gracious, winning young

womanhood. Mrs. Clay, the "Belle of the Fifties," was the wife of Clement C. Clay, jr., who was elected to the United States Senate from Alabama in 1853. He remained a United States Senator until he resigned on the secession of Alabama in 1861. He was later elected to the Confederate States Senate, was sent to Canada on a confidential mission and returned to the Confederacy just as it fell. He was outlawed, being accused of conspiracy in the assassination of President Lincoln. He did not wait for arrest, but went to the Federal authorities and voluntarily surrendered, and was imprisoned for many months.

Mrs. Pryor, who has herself written in a most fascinating way her "Reminiscences of Peace and War" has given to the public, through the Macmillan Company in October, 1904, a no less charming transcript of public men and manners. Her husband, Roger A. Pryor, as a young man won by articles in a Virginia paper a place on the editorial staff of the *Washington Union*. He was made Minister to Greece during President Pierce's administration. Elected congressman from Virginia, he served from 1856 to 1861. He became, then, a colonel, and afterwards a general in the Confederate States Army.

Mrs. Chestnut, whose diary is given under the title of "A Diary from Dixie," was the wife of James Chestnut, jr., United States Senator from South Carolina, from 1859 to 1861. He was afterward an aide to President Davis, and a brigadier-general in the Confederate Army. The Messrs. Appleton and Company brought out the book in March, 1905, edited by Miss Isabel Martin and Mrs. Myrta Lockett Avary. Miss Martin was left as Mrs. Chestnut's literary executor, and has shown decided ability in the execution of her trust.

There is not a flavorless page in one of these books, nothing tame, although there is noticeably an underlying placidness, in spite of the vivacity, the peril, the sorrow of the times portrayed. It evinces the high breeding of the women with whom we enter on the joys of peace and plenty, the sufferings and perils of war, the agonies of ruin and reconstruction. Although these women were factors in every society that they entered, were petted and admired, toasted and sought after, we are never tempted for one moment to forget that they are the

wives of their husbands. There is the girlish prattle of "Dan" of the Virginia "child-wife". "A Belle of the Fifties" from the dedication, "to the husband of my youth," to the end of the last page echoes the name of "Mr. Clay" and "my husband" a hundred or more times. The open admiration of Mrs. Chestnut for "James Chestnut," and the hero-worship of Mrs. Pryor for "General Pryor" are fascinating in their freshness, as sweet as the south wind blowing from a bank of violets.

Carlyle says history is made of innumerable biographies. Accepting his dictum we may not gainsay the value of the books of which we have been writing. The first scene of the stage setting of "A Virginia Girl in Dixie" is Norfolk. "The almost limitless hospitality of those days made all the sharper the distinction between 'open house' and 'open hand.' In the forties, the reserve of the American girl was more like that of her English sister than it is at the present day. The gentlewoman of the old South was a past mistress in the art of tact. Its office, as understood, was to relieve painful situations, not her own; to contribute to the comfort and pleasure of others." The first scene of the stage-setting of Mrs. Pryor is Washington. Mrs. Clay gives a prologue of Alabama, but the action really begins with Washington, time the early fifties and as late as sixty-one. Mrs. Chestnut begins with Secession, and shifts from Charleston, Montgomery, Richmond, Columbia are rapidly made. All of the situations, with each of the women after Secession, are to the close of the books dramatic.

The group of women who write have not depended on their memories for what they present. They have had as aids their diaries faithfully kept; letters which were written by them, received from others; newspaper clippings long preserved. Altogether the human interest is so great as to be impelling; there is not one in all the States of the Union who may not read with pleasure. The leaves may to some seem yellowed by prejudice but never torn with passion.

The earlier chapters of Mrs. Pryor and Mrs. Clay are charming to the senses. Paris gowns, fancy balls, State dinings, brilliant repartee dazzle and enchant. The men are those who made history. The Senate was composed of men of high intellectual and

moral standards. From the South, men were sent who were worthy of her historic and lofty political and social traditions. These maintained the most cordial relations with colleagues and the representatives of sister States. The men of whom Mrs. Clay, Mrs. Pryor and Mrs. Chestnut write so familiarly were the statesmen who counselled wisely, lived cleanly, fought bravely, died gallantly, or with dignity and acceptance existed to the end of their natural lives. Few are the shadows falling across the beginning of the records.

Mrs. Clay has the precedence, in years, of these court ladies whose memories have rescued the brighter side of our national life, as well as vivid scenes of the darker days of the Confederacy. How delicious her courtship in Alabama in the early forties! "All the swains of that day," she tells us, "wrote in verse to the ladies they admired and each tender rhyme required a suitably presented acknowledgement." Query: What was a suitably presented acknowledgement? William L. Yancey, the great apostle and orator of secession, bowed at her shrine. When she was a girl he danced, at a ball, with her. She wore in her hair a white feather. The next day Yancey composed some charming verses and sent them to her: "To the lady with the snow white plume." A present day partner would have more aptly, himself, shown the white feather and fled from the exigence of verse.

Long engagements apparently were not the fashion. A ten days courtship; a four weeks engagement; a hastily gathered trousseau selected in part by (the brilliant society leader and friend in Mobile) Madam Le Vert; a wedding; the decorations, "green foliage and white hyacinths in every available space in my Uncle's house." "The Legislature came in a body, Solons of the State," and "The president and faculty of the State University of which Mr. Clay was a favored son." Legislatures must have been less mixed than now, to have been bidden as a body to the wedding feast; college president and faculty more sociable or not so hard worked — now could more than one be found to represent the institution at such a function?

Few were the railroads, and none then between Tuscaloosa and Huntsville. The journey to Mr. Clay's home was made in

a "big four-wheeled stage-coach." "Stone Mountain reached, we were obliged to descend and pick our way on foot, the roughness of the road making the passage, in the coach, a very dangerous one. But these difficulties only lent a charm." The stage-driver, proud of bringing home the bride, blew a blast on his statge-horn and whipped up his horses, as he drove into town and "friendly hands and kerchiefs waved a welcome."

In 1853 Mr. Clay was elected United States Senator from Alabama. His father had held the same position. The first winter spent in Washington Mrs. Clay was ill and sad. Otherwise she might never have known so intimately President and Mrs. Pierce. Mrs. Pryor tells us of Pierce's inauguration: "His face was pale, his countenance wore an expression of weary sadness. When he took the oath, he did not, as is the custom, use the word 'swear.' Placing his left hand on the Bible, without raising the book, he raised his right hand, looked upward and 'affirmed' that God helping him he would be faithful to his trust. Only two months before his only child, a beautiful boy of thirteen, was killed in a railroad collision — killed before his parent's eyes."

In the winter of 1855-56 a life for which Mrs. Clay was eminently fitted began for her. An Englishman travelling in the Southern States somewhere in the forties remarked: "All the women in the South know English history and read Congressional Debates." Mrs. Clay says of herself that she was "a hereditary believer in States' Rights. To read the Bible and to know my *Richmond Examiner* was as innate to my training as to be proud of my section of country and my family name."

Political feeling ran high in the Senate and House during the administration of Pierce, but the surface of social life flowed in a peaceful sunlit stream of receptions, dinings and balls. Mrs. Clay pictures these: "An agreeable function no longer in vogue, in this country, was the evening party. Lady Napier gave one of these parties to present her friends to Edward Everett. These parties were arranged that pleasant people might meet distinguished strangers and each other. As this was the principal object of these occasions, there were no blatant bands to make conversation impossible. Nobody thought of hiring entertainment for guests. The guests were bright talkers and could entertain

each other. The wives of the brilliant men of Mr. Buchanan's administration understood entertaining. There were always gifted conversationalists present, who liked talking better than eating — with cleverness to draw out, not forestall, the wit of others." Conversation evidently was the first feature of entertainment. Of course there were balls, very brilliant ones; not often cards. Mrs. Pryor writes of society: "There were many beautiful and brilliant women who escaped the notice of the society newsmonger of the day. The wittiest and brightest of all was Mrs. Clay, the wife of Senator Clay from Alabama. She was extremely clever, the soul of every company. A costume ball at which she personated Mrs. Partington is still remembered in Washintgon. Her malapropos replies had to be impromptu — improvised on the moment — and must, moreover, be seasoned with wit to redeem them from being commonplace. Mrs. Clay rose to the occasion, and her Mrs. Partington became the Mrs. Partington of the future."

Mrs. Clay, herself, gives a delightful account of this festivity. Senator Seward during the winter "had made numerous efforts to meet me, but my Southern sentiments were wholly disapproving of him, and I had resisted even my kinder-hearted husband's plea and steadily refused to permit him to be introduced to me. 'Not even to save the Nation could I be induced to eat his bread, to drink his wine, to enter his domicile, to speak to him!' I once impetuously declared. At the ball I noticed Mr. Seward hovering in my neighborhood. I was not surprised when he, 'who could scrape any angle to attain an end,' finding none brave enough to present him, took advantage of my temporary merging into Mr. Shillaber's character and presented himself to 'Mrs. Partington.' He was very courteous, if a little uncertain of his welcome, as he approached me, and said, 'Aunt Ruthy, can't I, too, have the pleasure of welcoming you to the Federal City? May I have a pinch of snuff with you?' It was here that Mrs. Partington reminded him that the donor of the snuffbox 'loved the Kawnstitewtion'. I gave him the snuff, and with it a number of Partingtonian shots about his opinions concerning 'Slave Oligawky,' which were fearless if funny, as the Senator seemed to find them, and I passed on. This was my only meeting

with Mr. Seward." Senator Clay was near during this interview. His own relations with Seward were always courteous and kindly. At Mrs. Clay's parting sally, Senator Seward remarked, "Clay, she is superb!" "Yes," returned Mr. Clay, "when she married me, America lost its Siddons."

Mrs. Clay's memories of Mrs. Pryor and Mrs. Chestnut have the ring of genuine admiration: "I have spoken of Mrs. Pryor, the beautiful wife of the young diplomat, who had won general approbation for his success in conducting a mission to Greece. Not of our special mess, Mrs. Pryor frequently mingled with us, being the particular friend of Mrs. Douglas and Mrs. Pugh. They were in truth a harmonious trio — Mrs. Pugh being a perfect brunette, Mrs. Douglas a blonde, and Mrs. Pryor a lighter brunette, with soft brown hair and eyes. Mrs. Pryor wore a distinctive coiffure and carried her head charmingly. Even at that time she was notable for the intellectuality which has since uttered itself in several charming books." Of Mrs. Chestnut she says: "Two interesting members of our 'mess' were General and Mrs. Chestnut. The General, a member from South Carolina of the Senate, who afterward became one of the Staff of Jefferson Davis, was among the princes of wealth in the South in the fifties. Approximately one thousand slaves owned by him were manumitted by Mr. Lincoln's proclamation. Childless, propertyless, our well loved Mrs. Chestnut suffered a terrible eclipse after a brilliant youth and middle age. She was the only daughter of Governor Miller of South Carolina; having been educated abroad she was an accomplished linguist and ranked high among the cultured women of the capital."

There seems to have been a full complement of men at the functions. Indeed, it was in the fifties that the United States acquired a reputation of generous and graceful hospitality. Mrs. Chestnut declares: "One must have been hard to please who did not like the people I knew in Washington."

As we read the recollections of "A Belle of the Fifties" we are tempted to think that "the distance" of years has "lent enchantment" to memory. Mrs. Clay says that "a hundred charming hostesses renowned for beauty and wit and vivacity" were in her circle. How ingenuous the tale of the dinner at the

White House where the *entrée* of a new course toward the end of the feast with an unknown viand (to her) made her tremble for fear of a *faux pas* on her part. Her *vis à vis* was an American lady who had married Baron de Bodisco, the Russian Minister. She had been received at the Russian Court and must know how to help herself. Mrs. Clay watched her, and was ready not only to manipulate correctly, "the parallelogram of paper holding the ice," but to glance expressively at a M. C. from Virginia who was about "to dig out the contents." He caught her "shake of the head," saw that Mrs. Clay had taken a "whole one" and followed her cue. After dinner the grateful man came and whispered, "God bless my soul, Mrs. Clay! You are the sweetest woman in the world! But for your goodness I don't know what might have happened. I might be struggling with *that* problem yet."

Such glimpses of her wit to meet emergencies, trivial in themselves, it may be, are yet straws to show the course of the wind. The kindly thought, the sympathetic nod to save another from a *gaucherie* makes us understand how she drew all men and women to her in gala days — men and women who served her lovingly and loyally in adversity.

With all Mrs. Clay is so generously appreciative of the beauty and grace of her contemporaries, she is not all sugared sweetness. "Benny Fitzpatrick, the idol of his parents and the terror of the hotel," received motherly oversight from Mrs. Clay as well as from his own parent. Mrs. Fitzpatrick would say, "'Benny dear! How could you?' but, I, his foster mother, was constrained to resort at time to a certain old-fashioned punishment administered with the broadside of a slipper."

With the incoming of Mr. Buchanan's administration society in Washington took on more brilliance. Miss Harriet Lane, the niece of the bachelor President, took her place as the "first lady of the land." Her careful education, intellectual gifts, experience at the Court of St. James while her uncle was Ambassador to England, made her eminently fit for her position. Mrs. Pryor says that the "Dinners at the White House were much less elaborate than the dinners at the houses of the wealthy Cabinet Officers and Senators."

When Miss Lane went to Washington, her uncle, the President, gave her but one rule for her conduct: Never under any circumstances to accept a present. "Think of my feelings," she said to Mrs. Pryor, "when the lovely lacquered boxes and tables the Japanese Embassy brought me were turned from the door." But girls will be girls even though they are the nieces of Presidents. Miss Lane had a fine looking fellow in love with her. One day at Mount Vernon they were walking on the bank of the Potomac. She picked up some colored pebbles. The gentleman asked for them and put them in his pocket. He took them to Tiffany, had them polished, set with diamonds, and linked together in a bracelet. At Christmas he sent it to Miss Lane as a souvenir of Mount Vernon. She carried them for a week in her pocket, trying to get her own consent to giving them up. The more she looked at them, the more she liked them. One day the President was in fine spirits. He teased his niece about Lord Lyons, whom he especially fancied. She did not. For this time, however, she humored her uncle, and at last ventured: "Uncle Buchanan, if I have a few pretty pebbles given me you do not object to my accepting them?" "Oh no!" he exclaimed in high good-humor, "keep your pebbles!" "You know," Miss Lane said in telling the story, "diamonds are pebbles."

Mrs. Chestnut notes in her diary some gossip from Washington: "Harriet Lane has eleven suitors. One is described as likely to win, or he would be likely to win, except that he is too heavily weighted. He has been married before and goes about with children and two mothers. There are limits beyond which! Two mothers-in-law!—" Did Thackeray find in Washington "Lovel The Widower?" Thackeray lectured that winter in Washington and his *American Notes* show that not much escaped him. "Mr. Thackeray's lecture on poetry," says Mrs. Clay, "was a red-letter occasion and the simplicity of that great man of letters as he recited 'Barbary Allen' and 'Lord Lovel' was long afterward a criterion by which others were judged."

Mrs. Pryor makes a good story out of Patti when she was ten. Strakosch evidently had his hands full in his management of and for her. On the train the child took a fancy to a lady passenger and gave her full confidence. "Strakosch is utterly horrid—

just observe his great hands! Not for worlds would I sing for him were it not for the sugar-plums!" "At the end of the journey Strakosch approached the little girl and held out his hand to take her to her sister." "I am not going with you, said Adelina, 'I am going home with this lady.'" "Ah! but impossible," said Strakosch." "I will!" said the small rebel. "You know I always do things when I say I will." "Why not let her come with me?" said Mrs. Glasgow (the mother of Ellen Glasgow, the novelist)." "A scene was imminent. 'If I consent, Adelina,' he said, 'will you be ready for rehearsal?'" "Will you be sure to bring me back?" "Sure — I promise." "How much candy?" was the next excited question." "A whole pound!" "Not enough!" "Two pounds," said Strakosch, glancing around to satisfy himself that the scene attracted admirers and possible concert goers." "Not enough," persisted Adelina, shaking her head." "A hatful!" cried Strakosch, and that won the day." Patti had an eye to business, although only ten years old. The narrative goes on at the end of the child's four days stay. Mrs. Glasgow invited ten or fifteen child neighbors to a dolls' party with Adelina Patti. At the close of the evening she said, "Now, Adelina, these little girls have been very kind to you; they have brought you lovely flowers; I wish you to sing one little song for them." A shrewd look possessed the tiny face; "Sing — for — them! Sing without money! *Mais non! J'ai toujours beaucoup des fleurs.*" Mrs. Clay gives a lively account of a party in Washington given to Patti when she was ten years older. It is too long to quote. Enough to say fun was so fast and furious, that Patti joined in, mounted a chair and "her liquid notes in alt joined the deep ones of the Baron. She clapped her hands and fairly shouted with glee."

Mrs. Pryor tells us of those Washington days: "Conversation had always at the South been carefully cultivated." "Some books were just out in England and everybody was discussing them. Tennyson was turning all the girls' heads with 'Elaine.' A new star was rising — George Eliot. Everybody marvelled at the wonderful young man who had written 'Adam Bede.'"

There are so many delicious things in these books. Even the

quotable ones would demand a special edition of the REVIEW. "In the winter of '59-'60," says Mrs. Clay, it became obvious to every one that gaiety at the Capitol was waning. Aside from public receptions all had now become palpably perfunctory, only an occasional wedding served to give social zest to the rapidly sobering Congressional circles. Women went daily to the Senate gallery to listen to the angry debates on the floor below. When belles met they no longer discussed furbelows and flounces, but talked of forts and fusilades." She continues: "Not a Southern woman but felt with her husband the stress of that session, the stings of the wrongs the Southern faction of that great body was struggling to right. Senator Clay, than whom the South has borne no more self-sacrificing son, nor the Nation a truer patriot, was an ill man as that 'winter of national agony and shame' (*vide* the Northern witness Judge Hoar) progressed. The incertitude of President Buchanan was alarming; but the courage of our people to enter upon what they knew must be a defense of everything they held dear in State and family institution, rose higher and higher to meet advancing danger."

"A momentous day in the history of this country was Nov. 6, 1860. On that day the extreme party of the North elected its candidate, with a vice-president, making its party purely sectional," writes Mrs. Pryor. The scene is finally shifted from Washington. On the 20th of December, 1860, South Carolina singly asserted to the world her faith in the doctrine of State Sovereignty. Represented by the delegates chosen by the people in Convention assembled, she passed the Ordinance of Secession. There was not a dissenting vote. It was a solemnly conscientious act. Some may now deem that ordinance a mistake. We cannot know. Scenes of greater horror than bloody battles may have been averted by it. For years emissaries had been counselling the negroes of the slave States to insurrection. After the raid of John Brown it seemed not unlikely that midnight burnings, slaughtered innocents, outraged women might be incited by other fanatics. That the government for the people might be by the people of their own section, Secession was believed the reasonable remedy. It was not entered into unadvisedly but soberly, with deep feeling and deep regret.

Bancroft says but for South Carolina the colonies would never have gained their independence. The Union of their building had been beloved by the South.

The first entry in "A Diary from Dixie" is "December 8, 1860. Lincoln is elected!" "December 21. Mrs. Charles Lowndes was sitting with us to-day, when Mrs. Kirkland brought in a copy of 'The Ordinance of Secession'. I wonder if my face grew as white as hers. She said after a moment, 'God help us!' 'As our day is our strength shall be.' How grateful we were for this pious ejaculation of hers."

Mrs. Chestnut all through her Diary shows what a "tear to the soul was the inevitable war." She often jests — but it is as a boy whistles to keep his courage up. She never doubts the right of State Sovereignty. She does not question the act. "Some one on the cars said 'James Chestnut has resigned his seat in the Senate;' another rejoins, 'Mrs. Chestnut does not look at all resigned.'" Mrs. Clay says: "The saddest day of my life, January 21, 1861, after years of augmenting discussion between the sections, I saw my husband take his portfolio under his arm and leave the United States Senate Chamber in company with other no less earnest Southern Senators."

Mrs. Pryor adds: "The question of the hour with Virginia was not the right to introduce slavery into the territories. Nothing was said or thought about slavery. The question was of States' Rights only." "Said old John Janney, a Union man and President of the Convention of 1861, when taxed with having taken sides with Virginia against the Union: 'Virginia, sir, was a nation one hundred and eighty years before your Union was born!'" "The overt act for which everybody looked had been really the reenforcement by Federal troops of the fort in Charleston Harbor," says Mrs. Pryor. "When Fort Sumter was reduced the war was on."

From this on the stage is crowded. Event follows event. Victory and defeat follow in quick succession. Men of action stand out in bold relief. "James Chestnut" is an aide of President Davis. Mrs. Chestnut is the intimate friend of Mrs. Davis. Mr. Clay is elected Confederate States Senator and Mrs. Clay is the greater part of the time with him in Richmond. Roger A.

Pryor raises a regiment, is elected colonel, and his wife follows the army. "Dan's" wife, "A Virginia Girl in Dixie," is very near him at the time of more than one battle, and runs the blockade to Baltimore and back to bring him a "new uniform."

No excerpts can give an adequate idea of the breathless interest of the thrilling war experiences of these courageous women. The books must be read to have a just idea of what the war was to the women of the Southern Confederacy. "To be idle," says Mrs. Pryor, "was torture. We women resolved ourselves into a sewing society—resting not on Sundays. Sewing machines were put in the Churches, which became depots for flannel, muslin, even uniform cloth." This was in the first days of the Confederacy. Later there was little material on which to sew.

Mrs. Pryor gives some good anecdotes of the negroes. "A Captain going into a skirmish one day, left his tent and contents in the care of Cæsar. 'Mayn't I go he'p de cook?' 'Stay here and protect my things, commanded the master. Cæsar, left alone, grew more unhappy. When shot fell like hail, he fled to the bushes. He came back after the shooting stopped, but the Captain was there before him. 'You rascal! Didn't I leave you here to protect my property? It might all have been stolen.' 'I knows it, sah, I knows it! An' I did purtect yo' property, sah! I sholy did! Dem ole close aint wuth nothin'! I'se feared to bresh 'em less'n I gits a hole in 'em; but *dis* property'—laying his hand proudly on his own breast—'*dis* property is wuth fifteen hundred dollars!' " Mrs. Chestnut philosophizes over the blacks more than the other ladies: "Mrs. Wigfall came in and we had it out on the Civil War. We solaced ourselves dwelling on all its known horrors, and then added what we had a right to expect with Yankees in front and negroes in the rear. 'The slave owners must expect servile insurrection, of course,' said Mrs. Wigfall, to make sure that we were not unhappy enough. . . . Not by any look or word can we detect any change in the demeanor of these negro servants. Laurence sits outside the door, sleepy and respectful and profoundly indifferent. So they all are. They make no sign. Are they stolidly stupid? or wiser than we are; silent and strong, biding their time?"

This was while the bombarding of Fort Sumter was going on.

Just before Manassas she writes: "I did not know there was such a 'bitter cry' left in me, but I wept my heart away to-day when my husband went off. Things do look so black. When he comes up here he rarely brings his body-servant—a negro man. Laurence has charge of all Mr. Chestnut's things — watch, clothes, and two or three hundred gold pieces, that lie in the tray of his trunk. All these papers, etc., he tells Laurence to bring to me if any thing happens to him. I said: 'Maybe he will pack off to the Yankees and freedom with all that.' 'Fiddle-sticks! He is not going to leave me for anybody else. After all, what can he ever be, better than he is now — a gentleman's gentleman?' 'He is in the sound of the enemy's guns, and when he gets to the other army he is free.'" All this is more than a year before Lincoln's first Proclamation. Mrs. Chestnut's intimate friend, Mrs. John S. Preston, had a maid Maria. She records of her: "Maria said of Mr. Preston's man, 'What he want with anything more, ef he was free? Don't he live just as well as Marse John do now?'" "I have seen a negro woman sold on the block at auction. I was walking and felt faint. Her mouth was in a grin of excitement. I dare say the poor thing knew who would buy her. I sat down on a stool in a shop and tried to discipline my wild thoughts. I tried it Sterne fashion. You know how women sell themselves, and are sold in marriage from queens downward. You know what the Bible says about slavery and marriage; poor women! poor slaves! Sterne with his stalling — what did he know? He only thought, he did not feel."

The surrender came. Laurence and Maria had no idea of leaving their old owners. "May 1st, 1865. The Yankee soldiers taunted the negro women for their foolishness in standing by their cruel slave owners." "May 2nd. 'The fidelity of the negroes is the principal topic. There seems to be not a single case of a negro who betrayed his master, and yet they showed a natural and exultant joy at being free.'" . . . "Mrs. Barton drove with me to Mulberry. On one side of the house we found every window had been broken, every bell torn down, every piece of furniture destroyed, and every door smashed in. But the other side left intact. Maria and her mother who had been left in charge, explained this odd state of things. The Yankees were

as busy as beavers, working like regular carpenters, destroying everything when their General came in and stopped them. He told them it was a sin to destroy a fine old house like that, whose owner was ninety years old." . . . "They carried off sacks full of our books, unfortunately they found a pile of empty sacks in the garret. Our books, letters, papers were afterward strewn along the road as far as Vance's Ferry." . . . "The raiders burned our mills and gins and a hundred bales of cotton. Indeed, nothing is left us now, but the bare land, and the debts contracted for the support of hundreds of negroes during the war."

"May 18. Colonel Chestnut, (her husband's father) now ninety-three, blind, deaf, is apparently as strong as ever. Partly patriarch, partly grand seigneur, this old man is of a species we will see no more — the last of a race of lordly planters who ruled this Southern world, but now a splendid wreck. His manners are unequalled still, but underneath this smooth exterior lies the grip of a tyrant whose will has never been crossed. I will not attempt what Lord Byron says he could not do, but must quote again: 'Everybody knows a gentleman when he sees him. I have never met a man who could describe one.' " "African Scipio walks at Colonel Chestnut's side, he is six feet two, a black Hercules, and as gentle as a dove in all his dealings with his old master, who boldly strides forward, striking with his stick to feel where he is going. The Yankees left Scipio unmolested. He told them he was absolutely essential to his old master."

"May 20. Went to our plantation, the Hermitage, yesterday; not a soul absent from his or her post."

In 1864, General Roger A. Pryor was taken prisoner. The problem withal to Mrs. Pryor was, "How can I maintain my children? My husband's rations were discontinued." The faithful wife had kept in touch with her husband's command. "A number of my old Washington servants had followed me, but they could not now, of course, look to me for support. I told John and Eliza frankly my condition, but they elected to remain." . . . "The question that pressed on me day and night was: How, and where can I earn some money?"

An old gentleman used to say: "Hang a woman with no contrivance." Mrs. Pryor by a lucky accident could get hold of a

trunk containing some of the handsome costumes she had worn four years before in Washington. "There were half a dozen or more white muslin gowns, flounced and trimmed with Valenciennes lace." There were silks, gold embroidered, artificial flowers, feathers, fur, velvet. . . . I ripped all the lace from the evening gowns, and made it into collars and undersleeves." These were sent to Richmond and promptly sold. "Human nature is the same all the world over and ladies will indulge in little vanities in spite of war and desolation. To these vanities I now found myself indebted." 'Aunt Jenny,' her old cook, felt uncertain. "'Honey,' she said, 'don't you think in dese times of trouble, you might do better dan tempt dem poor lambs in Richmond to worship the golden calf and bow down to Mammon? We prays not to be led into temptation, an' you sholy is leading dem into vanity' 'Maybe so, Aunt Jenny, but I must sell all I can. We have to be clothed, you know, war or no war.' 'Yes, my chile, dat's so, but we'se told to consider de lillies. Gawd A'mighty tells us we clothe ourselves in the garment of righteousness, and He—' 'You always 'pears to be mighty intimate with Gawd A'mighty,' interrupted Eliza, in great wrath. 'Now you just go 'long home an' leave my mistis to her work. How'd *you* look with nothin' on but a garment of righteousness?' "

The story of General Pryor's imprisonment and parole are thrilling. "Mr. McLean and Colonel Forney first approached General Grant. The General positively refused their request. Then Mr. McLean visited Mr. Stanton." He found Stanton at home, a little daughter on his knee. McLean tried to touch this human side. He spoke of the sweet fireside picture: "This little lady cares nothing for the Secretary of War. She has her father, that fills her ambition." "You never said a truer word, did he pet?" caressing the curly head. McLean spoke of children in Virginia who loved their fathers as this one did and their bright eyes were dimmed with tears. "'Yes, yes! Probably so,' said Stanton. 'Now—there's Pryor—' But before another word could be said the Secretary of War pushed the child from his knee and thundered: 'He shall be hanged! Damn him!' "

McLean appealed from the verdict. With a letter from Mr. Horace Greeley he went to President Lincoln. He knew of General Pryor's kindness to prisoners at various times, his prompt parole at Manassas of an ambulance corps — surgeons, wounded prisoners, a whole camp. The President issued an order for the release of General Pryor on parole. Confined with General Pryor was John T. Beall, the intimate friend of John Wilkes Booth, under sentence of death as a spy. McLean and Pryor tried to save him, but Lincoln said a telegram from General Dix made it imperative that he should be executed. It is believed that it was the death of this friend, working on the fevered brain of Booth, that caused him to kill President Lincoln.

Says the "Virginia Girl," "Johnston's Army surrendered. I sat and watched by my window"—"two days passed no Dan." She went to sleep and woke, her husband in rags and worn by her: "Ah, we were happy! Ragged, defeated, broken, we had but each other, but that was enough!"

"Early in the spring of '64, Mr. Clay felt it his duty to accept the high responsibility of a diplomatic mission to Canada, with a view to arousing in the public mind of this near-by British territory a sympathy for our cause and country, that should induce a suspension of hostilities. Despite the failure of our representatives in European countries to rouse apathetic kings and dilly-dallying emperors to come to our aid," says Mrs. Clay, "it was hard for us to believe that our courage would not be rewarded at length by some powerful succor or yielding." It was while Senator Clay was away that Mrs. Clay was for a while the guest of Honorable James Hammond of South Carolina, ex-Governor and ex-Senator. His plantation home on Beech Island was an ideal one. The description of it written by Mrs. Clay would almost of itself repay for the perusal of her book. The mission of Mr. Clay was futile. Returning he ran the blockade for Charleston. The vessel became a target for Federal guns. The passengers took to the life-boats, were grounded, but after much exposure Mr. Clay got to Charleston. He made his way to Richmond, but only to turn around and follow the retreating President and Cabinet. He returned to Macon where Mrs. Clay was dom-

iciled. He and Mrs. Clay went from thence to Senator Hill's in western Georgia.

There they heard the news of Lincoln's assassination. Mrs. Clay drove to the station to hear the latest news. Mr. Clay, with Mr. Wigfall, had planned to go on to Texas. At the station a man told Mrs. Clay: "That Macon had been surrendered to the Federals. Atlanta is in the hands of the Yankees." "Is there any other news than that of the proclamation for Mr. Davis' arrest?" I asked. His reply astounded me. "Yes, Madam!" he said; "\$100,000, is offered for Clement C. Clay of Alabama." A trembling seized me. I don't know how I made my way to the carriage." Presently a friend gave her the proclamation and told her to go home at once to show it to Mr. Clay. She with other friends urged him to "fly!" "Fly! From what?" Mr. Semmes' answer came drily, "From death I fear." Instead Mr. Clay sent at once a telegram to the General Commanding: "Seeing the proclamation of the President of the United States, I go to-day with the Honorable P. Phillips to deliver myself to your custody. C. C. Clay, jr."

Then came eleven months of severe imprisonment. The heroic efforts of Mrs. Clay; the steadfast devotion of the friends of the happier days—it is all painful, wonderful, beautiful. The unjust suspicion and incarceration; the persistence of wife and friends; at last Mr. Clay's release. The volumes must be read and will be read by all who are studying the history of this great reconstructed country.

Even a casual reader will be impressed that with all the vicissitudes of fortune through which these women passed there is no disintegration of character. Brave, broad, buoyant. Always true to their ideals. Loyal to their friends, not embittered against their foes. True to their country, to their husbands, to their God. As old Sir Thomas Browne said, "These are the men and women that have played their parts and have made their exits, but they have delivered unto posterity an inventory of their virtues, and shall we not live up to them?"

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